A Guide to Help You Prepare Students for the   
*Grade 12 ELA Standards Test*

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Preparing for the Provincial Standards Test?

**WHO MUST WRITE?** If you are a Manitoba student enrolled in a 40S Focus course as your first credit in Grade 12 English Language Arts, you are required to write the Provincial Standards test.

**WHEN DO YOU WRITE?** The test is administered twice a year. If you are in a semester-system and began this course in the fall, you likely will write the Standards test in January. If you began the course in February, you probably will write the test in June.

**WHO MADE THE TEST?** This Provincial Standards test is created by English Language Arts teachers from various types of schools and all parts of the province.

**WHAT DOES IT TEST?** The test, which counts for 30 percent of your final course mark, assesses your success in acquiring the knowledge, skills, and abilities expected of a Grade12 English Language Arts student. Although students from Comprehensive, Literary, and Transactional Focus courses write the same test. It is understood that your performance on the test reflects your growth and achievement in previous ELA courses, not just your learning in Grade 12 courses.

**WHAT CAN YOU DO TO SUCCEED?** While many of the test activities are designed to assist you as you plan and write an extended text, they also assess specific learning outcomes. Participate whole-heartedly in all the test activities.

That said, you *must* complete all questions that have mark attached to them. Zeros have the biggest negative effect on test scores. You must also Pace yourself during the test and check over your work to be certain that you have written the best answer possible. If you expect that you will need extra time to complete the test or if you are dealing with a disability that might need an adapted approach, please advise your instructor early in the course. Such arrangements with the Province must be at the time you are registered for the test.

**YOUR WRITING TOOLS**: You will need the following materials for writing the test--

* an HB pencil (dark lead, good eraser) for completing demographic data
* a blue or black pen (for writing the test and form making notes in any readings provided)
* a highlighter (for marking significant passages or quotations in the readings provided)
* White Out (to make minor changes on the final copy of your extended written text)

You are also encouraged to bring--

* an English dictionary (to double-check your spelling) [Note: bilingual dictionaries **are** allowed if you need one]
* a thesaurus (to broaden your word choice) and
* a grammar book (to check rules of language)
* a bottle of drinking water

Day 1 – Three Hours

*Exploring the Theme: What's in it for me?*

You have probably seen athletes who, before a major competition, are busy stretching and warming up. They know that, in order to perform well, they must be ready physically and mentally.

Like athletes, good writers know that they must stretch and warm-up if they are going to excel in their work. They must activate their ideas and stimulate an easy flow of words.

Many composition studies show that the best writers - as they compose - go through steps similar to those provided in “Activating your thoughts”. Among practiced writers, these steps might be completed mentally. However, for most students, spending about five minutes on the activation task before reading the texts improves scores. It’s important to know what you know about the theme before you are too heavily influenced by the readings.

Writing down your thoughts as your read is also essential. The test allows you to talk about the readings before answering questions on them, so you should note texts that you have difficulty interpreting. Later, when you have the opportunity to talk, ask others how they interpreted the text.

*Group Discussion: Talking It Over*

By this time in our lives, we have had hundreds of conversations with our family members, our friends, and our classmates. Most of these conversations have been unstructured. Their primary purpose has been social, not the gathering of information or the stimulation of ideas. It has not mattered that they jumped from one topic to another or were interrupted by a phone call or the arrival of another person.

Although it may seem less natural, our conversations can be more structured and intellectually more beneficial. This is especially true if the discussion involves a number of people and includes viewpoints that challenge and clarify our own thinking.

Effective group work is a complex process. The key to success is often the leadership provided by one or two individuals. Yet a functional team needs more than leaders. It also takes a quality effort from all participants-starting with the questions and/ or observations they have prepared in advance. You will often asked to reflect on group process. Don’t know what to talk about? Especially for difficult texts,

* identify and explain the main idea in the text
* respond personally and critically to the ideas and impressions in the text
* appreciate the craft of the text – identify three techniques the text uses to achieve its purpose

*Responding to Text:*

The responding to text booklet may be the most stressful part of the test. There are six questions, one worth 10 marks, and the rest worth five, for a total of 35 marks. Given only about an hour and half to complete this task, you have to complete a question about every 15 minutes.

Your responses will be leveled, not graded as correct or incorrect, so the more developed your response, the higher the grade. Consider this strategy:

* 1. Read the question and put it in your own words. Make certain that you have accounted for all parts of the question.
  2. Write a topic sentence that answers the question directly.
  3. Support your topic sentence with reasons why your answer is true. Say to yourself, “Give me three good reasons why I should believe what you say is true.”
  4. For each reason, come up with examples or quotes for support.
  5. Each response should have about of six sentences, although more are often required for higher grades.
  6. Note that it’s better to have some kind of an answer than no answer at all. Pace yourself to complete all questions. Zeros have the biggest negative effect on test scores! Don’t spend so much time trying to get a five on one question that you end up with a zero on two others.

**The Extended Response**

One of the questions in the Responding to Text Booklet requires that you write “an extended response.” You will likely be given a choice between two texts, one that’s more transactional and one that’s more literary. The extended response may ask you to answer two of the following kinds of questions:

* identify and explain the main idea in the text

The biggest mistake you can make here is only summarizing the text. Instead, students should identify an idea (theme, central idea, controlling idea, main idea…), and then show how that idea is developed by the text. Ask yourself, “What’s the point this text is making?” Then ask, “How do I know?”

* connect a main idea in the text with your own experience

This kind of question asks you to make connections between the text and your experience, between the text and other texts, or between the text and other ideas in the text. The question might be worded this way, “Respond personally to the main idea in the text with reference to your own experience.”

* appreciate the craft of the text -- identify techniques the text uses and explain how these techniques to achieve its purpose

In January, 2005, this question was phrased “discuss how the writer communicates this idea.” What you want to do here is identify **techniques** that the author uses to communicate ideas. If the text is pragmatic, some examples of techniques might include contrast, anecdote, or appeals to reason. If you choose to respond to a aesthetic text, you might talk about characterization, imagery, or symbolism.

**Poetry**

The poetry chosen for the standards test has rarely been traditional lyric poetry, and tends to be fairly straightforward in terms of structure. The task is to make meaning from the poem in order to respond to the task given in a deeper way.

The poetry questions are usually phrased so that you are able to find your own meaning in the poem. For example the question will ask about a device used by the poet that you used to make meaning of the poem. In January 2004 the poem was based around a metaphor and the students were asked to suggest another metaphor that would fit in with the poem. The June 2007 test asked students to identify how the speaker’s words and/or actions reveal a change in perspective or relationship. Sometimes the question is based on a connection between the poem and the overall theme of the test. All of these questions require you to make meaning of the poem before you can respond.

There are a number of techniques to use when reading a poem, but one that works with all poetry is the “Walking Around a Poem” technique. In this technique you read the poem and then make notes around the poem. You can identify organizational techniques, vivid language that is used, connections that you can make between the poem and your own experience or how you see the poem connecting to the theme. You may need to do this more than once, but keep in mind how long you have to complete each question. Once you have done this “walk-around” try to find use the techniques that you have discovered to respond to the question. Remember that the key thing is to connect your answer with actual support from the poem. This may mean using some words or short phrases from the poem or it may mean discussion a technique that is used in more than one stanza. Any time you can extend your response beyond the text itself, connecting to something in your own life or another text or a societal issue you will create a deeper response which means that it will be levelled higher out of the scale of 5.

# Visuals

One of the most difficult tasks in the Responding to Text section of the test is dealing with the visuals. The have been a variety of visuals used in the previous standards test and so it is important to experience many different types of visuals such as: photographs, paintings, sculpture, graffiti, and advertisements… Each time you work with a visual or encounter a visual consider the following questions:

* What are the key elements of the visual? Line, colour, perspective etc.
* What might the creator have been trying to convey in the visual?

Once you have considered these two questions try to use them together to create an answer as outlined in the list above. You have to find support in your visual in the same way that you have to find support in a print text. Use all the elements of the visual, including the title or date or any other information you are given in the Process Booklet visual.

The questions for visuals have often been written using the phrase “How does a visual feature create a meaning or impression?” There is not a right or wrong answer and students across the province respond in a variety of ways. The difference is in the levelling and that levelling depends upon your connection between the specificity of the features that you choose and the meaning that you made from those features. This does not mean describing the visual, the features you use as support must connect with the response. As with all of Responding to Text questions the **more** you can connect the visual with a broader context, such as another text, the theme of the test or something in the world, the higher your response will be levelled.

*Thinking It Through: Connecting Ideas*

*TIP:* ***Although the test indicates that you have to complete the Connecting Ideas Questions on Day 1, you may want to leave them for day two if you need the time for your “Responding to text” booklet. You can’t work on the Responding questions tomorrow, but you can go back to “Connecting.”***

In the test’s Process Booklet, you’ll respond to two questions called “connecting ideas”.   
  
**Pulling Together Your Ideas**  
One of the Connecting Ideas questions is designed to get you to put ideas together, and hopefully forge an original central insight that you will be able to use for your own written text. For example, in January, 2005, one question asked “Identify two ideas about appearances from the texts you have read or viewed, either today, in class, or at any other time. Explain how these ideas work together to shape your thinking about appearances.” Another question of this sort asks students to formulate questions and explain why the question is important. This makes sense, because a good question can be restated as the central idea of your response

**The Process / Reflection Question**  
The other question type often asks you to reflect on the processes that you have encountered so far. For example, “Explain your contribution to group discussion.” Take care in answering this question – focus on process not content. This is TRICKY! If all you say is “I contributed ideas X and Y,” you have interpreted the question only in terms of the content. Think more closely about the process – did you provide leadership? Did you support the participation of others? Were you flexible and easy to get along with? An alternative question approach focuses more directly on the interaction of members in your group. For example “Evaluate the effectiveness of group discussion.” Again, focus on process: Did participants stay on topic-expressing ideas and opinions that helped the discussion? Did all participants give direction to the discussion? Were all participants encouraged to contribute their ideas? Was the atmosphere in your group supportive and respectful? Did the discussion help you to understand the theme?

***TIP: After previewing the writing task, many students work out their planning variables in detail at home. You can’t bring any paper into the exam for Day 2, but if you’ve worked it out in your head, you’ll have no trouble writing it out during the test.***

Day 2  
  
*Plan Your Work: Using the Planning Chart*

This chart is your map or template for the writing activity and it focuses on five important variables: your central idea, your purpose, your form, your audience, and the context in which your audience will experience the text. The trick to getting great marks on this portion of the test is this: the more clearly you can describe your text existing in the real world (with a real audience, at an actual time and specific place), the better you are likely to do. It’s much better to be very specific than to be vague or broad. Once you have identified the writing variables you want to use, you will be asked to explain how these variables work together. For example if your audience is hockey players and fans your context will not be a magazine focusing on baseball. A better choice of context might be a free magazine about hockey on display at hockey arenas. If your central idea is how hip-hop is the best music you might not want to choose seniors as your audience! The process of explaining how you variables work together is a good chance for you to check how well the variables connect.

Your evaluator will assess each aspect of your final work (content, organization, style, and mechanics) based on the writing variables that you specify. For example, if you have said you are going to write for an educated, adult male audience but then you use slang expressions that only a teen girl would relate to, your style mark will be lower.

*Understanding the Writing Task*

*"Plan and develop a written text that captures your understanding of \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.*

The writing task is broad and allows different writers to shape and narrow it to their respective interests and strengths. Before you begin writing:

* Remember that your text must be about the theme of the exam.   
  Think about the Process booklet texts you have read and viewed. Ask yourself how these texts connected to the theme and consider them as models for your own writing.
* Think about questions and observations that you and others made during the test process. One or more of those ideas might give you the springboard from which to begin your planning. After all, that’s what the connecting ideas task was for!
* Identify your particular interests and strengths as a writer. Don’t try something new now! If you read many articles in a teen magazine, you might opt for the article form. If you have considerable experience addressing public audiences (e.g. school or community groups), you might choose to apply your knowledge in a speech format. Or if you frequently read "Letters to the Editor" or the public letters of national leaders, you might adopt the letter form.

*The Five Writing Variables*

The identification of writing variables is an important and necessary step in planning a

written text (Day 2), but it is recognized that changes are often made to the variables as

the draft evolves. Therefore, marks are allocated to the exercise on Day 4, when you

record the writing variables.

During regular writing assignments, you should ask yourself how you would explain specific connections among the writing variables you have chosen. Questions that might prompt such connections could include the following:

* In what ways do the age, ability, and experience of the audience affect the choice of

form?

* What aspects of context (when and where the text will be experienced by the

audience) make it relevant and timely for the audience?

* How might the audience react to the central idea—would they be in favour of,

neutral about, or opposed to this idea?

*Figure 1: Planning Chart for the Writing Variables*

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Writing Task:**  Plan and develop a written text that captures your understanding or appreciation of \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ (theme) | |
| **Central idea:** State the central idea (e.g. theme, thesis, controlling idea, focus of your text) |  |
| **Purpose:** State the purpose of your text (e.g. to inform, to persuade, to entertain |  |
| **Form:** You may choose your own written form, or select or adapt one of the following (check one): | \_\_\_Letter \_\_\_Speech \_\_\_ Short story  \_\_\_Article \_\_\_Essay \_\_\_ Memoir  \_\_\_ Monologue\_\_\_ Script \_\_\_Other |
| **Audience:** Describe the characteristics of your intended audience. Your audience must be a public--not a personal--audience. |  |
| **Context:** Describe the situation in which the audience will experience your text. What aspects of **when and** where the text will be read affect the way you write it? |  |

We will review each of the five variables individually, yet it is important to note that the writing variables must work together logically.

For example, if your *central idea* states a view of success that you believe others should adopt, your purpose will be "to persuade." If you have chosen a high-school assembly as your *audience*, the *form* will probably be a speech, not an essay or an article.

**Central Idea**

The nature of your central idea will vary, depending on the form of writing that you choose:

* an essay may have a *thesis*
* a letter may have a *focus*
* an article may use a *controlling idea*
* a speech or a memoir may be organized around a *theme*
* a poem may have a *theme* or *mood*

The central idea is the one main idea around which your writing is organized. Everything in the piece should relate back to this idea in some way. That is why it is called "central." You might be able to use the idea you formulated in the connecting ideas question as your central idea.

**Purpose**

To figure out the purpose, answer the question "What do I hope this text will accomplish with my audience?” Another way to put the question is “What do I want the audience to think or do or feel after reading this text?"

Literary courses often lead students to purposes such as to enlighten, to entertain, to persuade, to argue, to inspire, etc. Transactional communication, by definition, always has a clear purpose, such as to respond to another person, to record what is happening, to recall what has happened, to report what has happened, to reflect on what is happening or on what tends to happen.

Whether you define your purpose in a literary or transactional manner, choose only one purpose. That will help you to be more focused in your writing.

**Form**

With choices come responsibilities. Once you chose a particular form, you are expected to follow the conventions of that particular form. Let us consider briefly some of the conventions you might include in some transactional forms:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| ***Article:*** | An article should have a title that attracts a reader's attention and then a catchy opening that motivates him or her to continue reading. Articles often make use of a variety of methods of development, such as facts, statistics, anecdotes, quotations, and comparisons. It will have a controlling idea to which all points relate and it will build up to a satisfying conclusion. |
| ***Essay:*** | An essay may take one of many forms. It may be *narrative* (telling a story that makes a point), *expository* (informing the reader how something works or the meaning of something), *argumentative* (arguing for or against a particular idea or position), or *persuasive* (convincing someone to do or to believe something). A narrative essay may be organized around a controlling idea. Expository, argumentative, and persuasive essays use a thesis around which to organize other examples, points, or illustrations. The tone of an essay will generally be formal and it will have a defined introduction and conclusion. |
| ***Speech:*** | A speech usually begins with a greeting that recognizes the people who are present and identifies the speaker's subject and credentials to speak on that subject. While a speech tends to be organized around a theme (some idea or feeling that the speaker believes to be true), it also has a distinct introduction and conclusion. |
| ***Memoir:*** | This is a story of a person, relating one's recollections of that person to a particular theme (e.g. how the person's life reflects the true meaning of success). A memoir is a story, so it has a plot (beginning, middle and an ending), a defined character, some description of the person and the setting, and possibly some dialogue. |

**Audience**

When writing for a public audience, it is important to identify clearly who are the members of that audience and what are their common characteristics. Anyone in the publishing or broadcast industry knows that different age groups have very different interests and tastes. It is easiest to write for an audience that is specifically defined. If an audience includes young people (teens), their parents (adults), and their grandparents (senior citizens), it is very hard to please everyone.

Consider the difficulty faced by writers who define their audiences in the following ways:

* *My audience will be a lot of people who are wondering what I'm writing about.*
* *Everyone who reads my essay.*
* *A general public of all ages.*

A general audience is made up of a number of specific audiences-teen, adult, senior citizen. If you know that you are writing for a general audience that includes all ages, you must assume the burden of addressing the needs and interests of each subgroup. However, if you are given a choice, be specific and focus on just one audience.

You would find it much easier to write for one of the following audiences:

* The audience for my speech will be Senior 1-4 students at a high-school assembly. Students tend to have short attention spans, and know little about this topic. Their interest level may be low.
* The audience for my article will be the adult subscribers to a parents' magazine. These subscribers are likely thirty-something suburb-dwellers who used to think they knew it all, but are now looking for wisdom from another generation.
* Community readers of our town website, most of whom are middle-aged adults. Most readers will look for connections to family, friends, or community members, so the tone must not be critical.

The key piece of advice here is to DESCRIBE not just IDENTIFY. Record the factors of your audience that would affect the way they will regard your text – their interest level, their prior knowledge, their attitude toward the topic.

**Context**

The context is the situation in which your audience is expected to read or view your text. In other words, describe aspects of WHERE and WHEN the text will be delivered that would change the way you write it. Context (along with audience) often determines how formal or informal your text should be (for example, sarcastic remarks might be appropriate for a speech, but not a speech at a funeral of one tragically lost to a car accident).

* A *letter* might be read in the Opinion section of the Friday edition of the *Winnipeg Free Press* in the lead up to Father’s Day.
* A *speech* might be heard as the third speech in a long afternoon graduation ceremony (valediction) in a church or large hall with a formal atmosphere.

*Understanding & Using the Writing Variables*

Here’s an assignment to get you thinking about the writing variables, by adjusting one (audience). When we did the practice standards test one of the most difficult tasks was to use the writing variables in a purposeful and cohesive way. The following is a quick activity to get you thinking about the variables.

**The prompt**:  
You went to a New Year’s Eve party. The live music was loud, the food and beverages were outstanding and everyone you know was there. Overall, the party was a real blast, in fact, the police were called to quiet the party down.

**The objective**:

Write three letters for three different audiences with the appropriate language and style for each, all telling (about...) the same story.

Remember that you will also have different central ideas and purposes for writing the letter, and also that the letters will be read by each audience in a different context. For example I have given you the audience of your parents and the form of the letter, what might be the:

* central idea (why you should not be grounded)
* purpose (arguing to get phone privileges)
* context (your letter will be slipped out from under your door as you have locked yourself in your room!)

**The task**:

Write a letter to the following people: your principal, your parents, and one to your best friend who wasn't in town. Simply tell them about the party.

Use the appropriate language and style for each audience. Be sure to be

specific and use details to make your audience feel as though they were at the party.

* Once you are done writing the three letters you must have at least one other student read them. Discuss the varieties of language used and the styles that seemed to work best.
* Write a short reflection on the following prompt: Which letter was easiest to write? Which was most difficult? Why? This discussion will help you to write your reflection in greater depth.
* Each letter should be approximately ¾ of a page in length and your reflection should be at least ½ of a page.

Recording Your Writing Variables

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Figure Recording Your Writing Variables

Once you have identified your writing variables in your planning chart and have completed your draft, you will be asked to identify them once again before you complete your final draft (see Figure 1). When you identify your writing variables this time, they will not be for yourself to help focus your writing, this time they will be for the person marking your writing task. You will be asked to indentify each of the five variables and then explain the connection between them.

You do not need to make connections among all writing variables. You should,

however, make several connections that are clear, logical, and specific. Note that no

marks are allocated to the identification of the writing variables; five marks are allocated to the explanation of specific connections among the writing variables.

*From Task to Text*

Your writing task is to create a text that captures your understanding of the theme. As you create your text, you will likely progress through familiar stages of the writing process-outlining, drafting, revising, editing, and publishing.

The following guidelines may help to clarify each of those stages.

**Outlining**

"Outline" is an artist's word. It refers to a picture that has contours but no shading.

When we apply this word to writing, it refers to the big picture that a writer has in mind when he or she sets out to communicate important ideas and information. If our writing task is a simple one, we might simply jot down a few points to remind us of our main ideas and their order as we begin our first draft. This is called an "impromptu" or "scratch" outline.

Often, however, we must write a text that is long and detailed or a piece in which the thinking is complex. Then, a more detailed outline helps us to stay organized and to focus on one part at a time. Used well, it can reduce the stress and confusion that sometimes accompanies the "drafting" stage of writing.

**Preliminary Outline**

The preliminary outline is like a roadmap-it shows you where you think you will go and how you expect you might reach your destination. If you create one and use it, your drafting will be like driving. You can concentrate on "getting there."

A preliminary outline is constructed quite carefully. It maps one's writing direction as best one can predict it. The **first step** in making a preliminary outline is to examine your central idea and to list the various ideas you have had while reading and thinking about it. You may scan the various resource articles, noting the ideas and information that seem most useful. When you have generated a list, go back over this record and eliminate any duplication or any ideas that seem to be irrelevant.

The **second step** is to group your ideas according to what they have in common. The ideas should be grouped into whatever categories seem most logical. In a narrative piece, for example, they may be categorized in the order of events. In an argumentative essay, on the other hand, they may be grouped by their importance.

The **final step** is to organize your ideas in a way that shows their degree of importance. That way, you will know at a glance whether you are dealing with a main idea or with a supporting detail.

At this preliminary stage of organization, you may find yourself going back and forth between the outline and the articles. For some ideas, you will know exactly what details you wish to use to support your general points. For other ideas, however, you may have to re-read the articles-or even seek out new ones-in order to locate the best examples or illustrations.

**Types of Preliminary Outline**

The preliminary outline serves as a "roadmap" as one takes the writing "trip." It indicates where the writer intends to go. Just as maps vary in style and format, so too do preliminary outlines.

The following three types organize information and ideas in a way that shows their degree of importance. The writer knows at a glance which are the main ideas and which are the supporting details. Consider each of the types and then use whichever one works best for you.

* Point-Form Outline: This is the most traditional type of outline and it uses a combination of numerals and letters to indicate ideas or information in a descending order of importance. Roman numerals (e.g. I, II, III) indicate the main ideas. Capital letters (e.g. A, B, C) note ideas which are slightly less important. Arabic numerals (e.g. 1, 2, 3) show the next level, followed by Small-Case letters (e.g. a, b, c).
* Web-Form Outline: This type of outline also indicates the order of importance of ideas but it does so in a visual display. A large box or circle may be placed around the central idea. Then lines connect it to smaller boxes, circles, or other shapes that represent ideas of lesser importance.
* Split-Page Outline: This type of outline also used a visual display to indicate the order of importance of ideas. The outline splits a page into two columns (the left one being about 1/3 of the page and representing the main ideas; the right one being about 2/3 of the page and listing the supporting details.

You have used this Split-Page structure in previous lessons of this course. In Lesson 1.4.2 "The One-Minute Moffett," you used it as a tool to assist your reading comprehension. In Lesson 4.2.4 "Making Your Interview Notes," you applied it as a tool for active listening. Now, in Lesson 6.2.2 "From Task to Text," you may also adopt it as a tool for writing organization.

**Revised Outline**

A writer usually forms a preliminary outline while he or she is still actively gathering ideas and information. Sometimes there are gaps that require further reading in order to fill. Sometimes the categories into which ideas that are grouped need to be changed as new information is added. Sometimes the order in which ideas or information are presented is altered as the planning progresses. The result is often a very messy preliminary outline.

To make the outline more tidy and useful during the drafting stage of the writing, you are welcome to revise your preliminary outline. This is called a "revised outline" and it is the map you can easily read as you journey into the drafting stage.

**Drafting**

Having created a preliminary or revised outline and having recorded notes from the texts you have read and viewed, your goal now should be to concentrate on writing about one idea at a time. In this drafting stage, you will refer to your notes for the supporting examples and illustrations, but you should not be encumbered with the original books and articles. The outline and the notes you have made should be sufficient.

If outlining is like mapping a trip in advance, then drafting is where "the rubber hits the road." Most of us, however, may look forward to beginning a journey more than to the start of any written piece. As we enter the "drafting" stage of the writing process, it may help to consider the psychology of our writing mind.

Decades ago, Dorothea Brande wrote an excellent book about the writing process. Called *Becoming a Writer*, it focuses on our writer's personality. As writers, she suggests, we have two selves: a creative self that taps into our unconscious mind for artistic energy and a critical self that turns to our conscious mind for editorial control. Both selves are important, but it is vital that we keep them in balance, and that we do not allow "the critic" in our mind not to dominate when we begin a written composition.

One way to allow our artistic self to lead during the drafting stage is to use a technique that teacher Peter Elbow calls "freewriting." One simply writes for five or ten minutes without stopping. This, he suggests in his book *Writing with Power*, is "the best way to learn….to separate the producing process from the revising process" (14).

You can use this freewriting technique as a way to warm up before writing, but you can also apply it to your Drafting stage. Having organized your ideas and information during the Outlining stage, you can suppress your analytic thoughts and allow the artist in you to take the lead. Look at the first main idea and supporting details on your outline and plunge into the writing. At this stage, you should not be too worried about the correctness of your grammar, usage, spelling and punctuation. Of course, these are important matters in a finished piece of writing, but they are best dealt with during the Editing stage.

*DAY 3*

*Revising and Reflecting*

On Day three of the test, you need to continue writing your text. Of course, the process is not clear cut: it’s messy – you may draft and revise and draft some more. Nonetheless, you should finish a draft today. You will be asked to reflect on your written draft and the processes that you used to produce it.

**Revising**

Some people confuse the act of revising with that of editing. Editing deals with the correctness of grammar, usage, spelling and punctuation. It is important but should be applied at a later stage in the writing process.

Revising means "to look at again" or "to see in a new way." This is not easy to do, especially if we have just finished the drafting stage. We may be too close to the emotional side of our composing and find it difficult to let our intellect take charge.

You can also assess your own work, using revision criteria that focus on clear content, appropriate use of form, smooth organization, and effective use of language. The following guidelines provide such criteria.

**Reviewing your Content**

In your written text, your aim should be to select original ideas that create an overall effect, achieve your stated purpose (e.g. to inform, persuade, entertain, inspire), and sustain the interest of your audience.

Look closely at your text and identify the first place that you express your central idea. Is it apparent to your reader early in the text what it is that you are writing about? Is your central idea well developed and supported?

If you followed an outline during your drafting stage, you will have provided general points to develop your central idea and details to support them. Did you manage to use all of the points and details as expected?

Have you used details to support your general statements? Consider the following examples:

***Original (generalization lacks support):***

"In the article 'Measures of Success,' the editor gives us a clear picture of what she considers successful."

***Revised (details support generalization):***

"In her article 'Measures of Success,' editor Lynn Povich suggests that it is a 'combination of the right elements' that makes a life successful. While single definitions may leave 'gaping holes in a life,' coping with too many definitions may leave others trying to 'manage the unmanageable.'"

**Reviewing Your Form**

When planning your text, you were free to choose any form -e.g. letter, article, essay, speech, or memoir. Once you have chosen your form, however, you are expected to use it knowledgeably.

Each form has particular characteristics and features the form and purposes of writing are closely related. Once you have chosen your form, you have also adopted a particular role as a writer and relate to your readers in distinct way. You will employ a distinct tone and address a specific or generalized time. You will also deal with a given level of complexity and handle the presence or absence of story.

If you have written an *article*, does it have an attention-getting title, a catchy opening, a satisfying conclusion, and a controlling idea that provides unity?

If you have written an *essay*, have you organized it around a thesis or controlling idea? Will your reader recognize it as a narrative, expository, argumentative, or persuasive piece of writing?

If you have written a *speech*, does it begin with a greeting appropriate to the audience and identify the your qualifications as a speaker? Does it have a distinct introduction, development, and conclusion that are around a theme?

If you have written a *memoir*, does it relate your recollections of a some person to the expected theme? Does it have a such story features as plot, character, description, setting, and dialogue?

**Reviewing Your Organization**

The organization that you need in a written text is determined by your central idea, your purpose for writing, and by the form you have chosen. In each of the suggested forms (e.g. letter, article, essay, speech, memoir), you need

* an opening that will catch the interest of your reader
* transitions as you move from point to point, and
* a conclusion that satisfies and provides closure.

**The Opening**

You can catch the attention of your reader in a variety of ways:

* Using a quotation

(The key to success, says retired astronaut Frank Borman, is to "pick one mission, focus on it, and give the best of your ability to accomplishing that mission."),

* Using a story from real life (an anecdote no longer than five or six sentences)  
    
  "All those years of hard work had finally paid off. I stood on the basketball court, with the tournament just over and the sweat still dripping from my arms. The Zone commissioner called my name… "M.V.P." Most Valuable Player. It's a feeling I will never forget. It's the feeling of success.")
* Use a general reflection.  
    
  ("Success is not an obsession with some single-minded goal, but rather a healthy balance of interests.")

**Transitions**

A smooth transition helps your reader to move from one major idea to another. Transition words may show the order in your ideas-e.g. *first, second, third; next, another, finally*. Transition words may show the varying importance of your ideas-e.g. *for example, equally important, most importantly*. Transitions may indicate a contrast among your ideas-e.g. *on the one hand, on the other hand, yet, but, however*.

For detailed lists of transitional words, please consult a writing text such as *Writers INC*.

* To be successful in life, young Canadians also need to work hard.
* Most importantly, we need to believe in ourselves, even when we have failed.

**An Effective Conclusion**

Your conclusion should give a sense of completeness or finality to your writing. There are a variety of ways to conclude a piece of writing.

* *The Summary Conclusion:* This is the easiest and most familiar type of conclusion. It briefly restates your central idea and the main points you've discussed.

"I've heard it said that 'the one with the most toys wins,' but that's not my view. Instead of such playground possessiveness, I've come to see success as having a balanced life. While material comforts and financial security are a part of it, my physical development, my intellectual growth, and my social and spiritual relationships are even more important."

* *The Poetic Ending:* Use of an appropriate quotation that suits very well. For example, if you have been writing about success as having "a right heart," you might conclude with Mark Twain's remark that one should so live that when one dies "even the undertaker will be sorry."
* *The Echo Ending:* If you have used an effective phrase in your introduction, you might use it again at the end. The popular speaker and writer Harvey Mackay began his Penn State commencement address with the interest-provoking words "The heart of a watermelon." He repeated them, along with other major points, in his conclusion.

Martin Luther King's most famous speech takes its title from the phrase that echoed throughout the ending--"I have a dream..."

* *The Circle Ending:* You return to the same idea with which you began. George Sheehan begins his article "Anatomy of a Champion" describing training for Olympic games and he ends it with the words "Let the Games begin." The reader has come full circle.

**A Stimulating Title**

Although a title is the first thing a reader may see, it often is the last organizational device that a writer uses. Once your text is written, you can create a title that points to your central idea and stimulates the curiosity of your reader or listener.

When one is writing in response to an assignment, one might use the title that accompanies it-e.g. "The Meaning of Success." That makes the titling process a quick decisions. However, an original title will do more to catch the attention of your reader.

* *The Right Heart: What Success Means to Me*
* *Money is Not Life's Report Card*

**Reviewing Your Language Use and Arrangement**

Your language use and arrangement deal with matters often described as writing style. They include:

· your ***voice*** (the persona you establish and maintain with your reader)  
· your awareness of ***audience***   
· your choice of ***vocabulary*** (diction)  
· your ***sentence variety*** and ***emphasis*** (syntax)  
· your smooth ***integration of quotations***

While it is important to get your ideas down quickly in the first draft, when you revise, you should seek to improve your style-not just to add content or to improve your handwriting.

shim**Reviewing Your Language Use and Arrangement - Voice**

If a close friend telephones you and says simply, "Hi, it's me," you probably will know who is calling. You can recognize the voice. And someone hearing you speak on the phone might well know with whom you are speaking. The voice you use is also recognizable.

In writing, as in speech, we can recognize a person's voice. Our "voice" expresses unique characteristics. Good writers learn to adapt their voices to their audience and to their context.

When you review and revise the first draft of your text, consider the following aspects of voice:

***The Level of Formality***

The voice you use in your writing is closely related to the audience that you are addressing. Some audiences prefer an informal tone, while others expect a more formal approach.

In the following sentence, a teenager is speaking. For which audience would the following sentence be appropriate-another teen? an adult? an elderly person?

*"The guy I was dealing with was a real jerk. He treated me like garbage."*

Given the jargon and the informality of the sentence, most of us might choose "another teen."

Most of us have a keen eye for differences in clothing styles and can sense what "fashion statement" is being made. We hear people speak of "the preppy look," "the grunge look," "the thrift-store look," and so on. Whatever our preferred style, we dress more formally on some occasions than on others.

Similarly, when we write, our style is more formal on some occasions than on others. Your level of formality should reflect the "dress" (or style) appropriate to the occasion. If you are writing to someone such as our provincial Premier or the Secretary General of the United Nations, you would adopt a tone more formal than you would with a close friend or a person of your own age.

***The Suitability to Audience***

As much as possible, your writing voice should be adapted to the audience whom you are addressing. None of us likes to be spoken of as if we were not present, but that is what happens in the following example. A teenaged writer is speaking to the adult subscribers of a parents' magazine. Unfortunately, there is nothing in the piece that indicates parents are the intended audience.

* **Original:** *Children today will not learn the real meaning of success if they do not have good examples. They take in everything they see and hear. When they see adults competing for minor things, they may also fight for things that don't matter.*

In the revised example below, the same idea is expressed. However, the writer now uses a figurative device known as "apostrophe" and speaks directly to the adult reader.

* **Revised for Adult Audience:** *We will not learn the real meaning of success if you do not set a good example. We take in everything we see and hear. When we see you competing for minor things, we may also fight for things that don't matter.*

***The Degree of Elaboration***

Some of us talk more than others, and we probably all know persons who say very little. "The strong, silent type," we call them.

While silence can be a virtue, so too is good speech. When you are writing about your ideas, elaboration is important. You will hold your reader's interest more effectively by showing what you have to say, rather than just telling it.

Consider the following examples:

* **Telling (underdeveloped):** *"This essay is about people's views and opinions on what success is."*
* **Showing (elaborated):** *"Benjamin Franklin once wrote that 'Great beauty, great strength, and great riches are really and truly of no great use; a right heart exceeds all.' How right he was! While many people portray success as physical beauty, bodily strength or financial security, I believe it can only be found in having a good relationship with oneself, with others, and with God."*

**Reviewing Your Language Use and Arrangement - Audience**

We have talked of audience in terms of geographic, demographic, and psychographic factors. Think of each of these factors as you review the written text you have drafted and consider the language you have used.

An idiomatic phrase might be well understood by local readers of your website, but very confusing to an English-speaker elsewhere in the world. If you write about a person "*being there* for you," some readers may picture a caring, supportive individual, while others may think of a taxi driver.

Besides being clear to your audience, your language should be inclusive and non-discriminatory. Might any of the words or phrases that you have used be offensive to persons of a different age, gender, race, or religious belief?

For example, have you said "businessman" instead of "business person"? "Fellow workers" instead of "co-workers"? "Forefathers" instead of "forebears"? "Male nurse" instead of "nurse"?

Have you said "Everyone has *his* own idea of success" rather than "We all have our own ideas of success"?

Whether your purpose is to inform your audience, inspire it, or persuade it, a sensitive use of language will do much to assist you. It is difficult for readers to accept another person's ideas if they have just been offended by language that excludes or discriminates. If how you write shows an understanding and appreciation of the diversity of your audience, your readers will likely show more understanding and appreciation of what you write.

**Reviewing Your Language Use and Arrangement - Vocabulary and Word Variety**

The American humorist Mark Twain once remarked that the difference between the right word and a nearly right one is the difference between "lightening" and a "lightening bug." Observe the difference of meaning in the two following sentences:

* *"Look at the**tourist attack that happened in the United States."*  
  (What was written)
* *"Look at the terrorist attack that happened in the United States."*  
  (What was meant)

Besides being accurate in the words we use, it is important that we provide variety for our readers. If we use such repetitious phrases as "the writer writes" or "the reader reads," it is apparent that we have given little thought to word choice. Think how boring our suppers would be if we had the same food every night. The same is true of our writing. If you have a thesaurus available, use it as you review and revise your text.

Observe how the following revisions give more word variety:

* (Original) *"Just like the people in the stories, you need to have a good attitude."*
* (Revised) *"Just like the people in the stories, you need to have a positive attitude."*
* (Original) *"Teens are already doing quite a bit."*
* (Revised) *"Teens are already contributing significantly."*

When writers summarize the views of several articles or authorities on a subject, they sometimes use the word "said" over and over. There are hundreds of variations; here are a few-explained, suggested, remarked, noted, advised, claimed, responded, argued, replied, exhorted, intimated, concluded, etc. The object is not to pack one's writing with "big words" but to provide variety and to use the word with the best shade of meaning.

**Reviewing Your Language Use and Arrangement - Sentence Variety**

If you use a mixture of simple and compound or complex sentences, you will help the reader to maintain interest in your text.

How much of the following essay would you care to read?

* *"I came across two articles while reading. These articles disagree with my meaning of success. One article is written by Patricia O'Toole. It is called 'Reaching for More.' This article contradicts my view of success."*

The writer's ideas are clear, but five simple sentences in a row limits their appeal. The revised excerpt has more sentence variety, is more enjoyable to read, and requires fewer words.

* *"Two articles I came across while reading disagree with my meaning of success. The first one, 'Reaching for More,' is written by Patricia O'Toole and it contradicts my view of success."*

**Reviewing Your Language Use and Arrangement - Integration of Quotations**

A skilful writer can incorporate smoothly the quotations that illustrate a particular point. Consider the following examples:

* (Original): *"A quote from The Right Mountain by Jim Hayhurst states the following: 'If you try to live by other's rules, you'll never be satisfied or feel successful, because there will always be someone richer, more beautiful, more talented, stronger, more successful than you.'"*
* (Revised): *"In The Right Mountain, Jim Hayhurst states: 'If you try to live by other's rules, you'll never be satisfied or feel successful, because there will always be someone richer, more beautiful, more talented, stronger, more successful than you.'"*
* (Revised): *" 'If you try to live by other's rules,' Jim Hayhurst states in The Right Mountain, 'you'll never be satisfied or feel successful, because there will always be someone richer, more beautiful, more talented, stronger, more successful than you.'"*

We can use quotations very effectively to illustrate our ideas, but we must be careful not to misuse the word 'quote.' To quote someone is to repeat that person's words, as the writer above repeated the words of Jim Hayhurst.

Note the following example:

* (Incorrect): *"Vincent Van Gogh once quoted: 'When I say I am an artist, I only mean, I am seeking. I am striving. I am in it with all my heart.'"*

As readers of Van Gogh's letters, we can quote the artist, but when he made this statement to his brother Theo, he was saying it for the first time.

* (Revised): *""Vincent Van Gogh once stated: 'When I say I am an artist, I only mean, I am seeking. I am striving. I am in it with all my heart.'"*

Generally, people who are quoted should be referred to by their last names. Here are two references to an article by Jon Douglas:

* (Original): *"Later in the article, Jon says, 'Do what you love and do it well and the money will follow.'"*

The first-name reference implies an intimacy with Mr. Douglas that is not appropriate.

* (Revised): *"Later in the article, Douglas says, 'Do what you love and do it well and the money will follow.'"*

*DAY 4*

*Editing: Grammar, Usage, Spelling and Punctuation*

You have reviewed your written text and revised it for such aspects of language as voice, audience, vocabulary, word and sentence variety, and the smooth integration of quotations. Now it is time to edit.

Editing deals with the correctness of grammar, usage, spelling and punctuation. The following links describe errors that are frequently found during text editing.

**Careless Spelling**

Some writers spell well, while others of us have great difficulty. In the final version of one's text, correct spelling is not a sign of the writer's intelligence, but it does suggest the care with which the ideas are researched and represented.

Here are some typical spelling errors from student writing:

* *aditude* (attitude)
* *article* (article)
* *curtious* (courteous)
* *rasisum* (racism)
* *wheather* (whether)
* *payed* (paid)
* *diciplin* (discipline)
* *due* (do)

The list goes on. The intended meaning is clear, but the message to the reader is not a positive one. It suggests an inadequate effort. A few minutes spent with a dictionary would probably eliminate most such errors from one's texts. If one is writing with a word-processor, such incorrect spellings are probably indicated and alternative spellings provided.

**Lack of Agreement**

A common error in student papers is the lack of agreement in pronoun number.

* (Original): *"I hope Canadian teens today can learn to accept people for who they are as a person."*

In the above example, *people* and *they* are plural, but *person* is singular. The simplest solution would be to drop the "as a person" phrase.

The next example is less obvious and perhaps more complicated. The word *one* is singular and the word *their* is plural.

* (Original): *"Everyone should speak their own opinion."*

One could correct this sentence using singular masculine or feminine pronouns.

* *"Everyone should speak his mind."* OR *"Everyone should speak her mind."*

This solution, however, introduces a problem of style. The *his* or *her* choice of language lacks gender sensitivity. A better solution would be to re-write the sentence. For example:

* *"One should speak one's own opinion."* OR *"People should speak their own opinions."*

**Faulty Word Choice**

Certain words seem to give writers more trouble than others. As you edit your text, check to see if you have made faulty choices for any of the following words:

* "then" (a time word) and "than" (a comparison word)

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| --- | --- | --- |
|  | Examples: | *I read the article and I knew then that I disagreed with it.* (time) *I read more articles than most of my classmates.* (comparison) |
|  | |  |

* "that" and "who" ("That" usually refers to things; "Who" refers to people)

|  |  |  |
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|  | Examples: | *There are many people working today who are honest and who do not hold a high position. There are many ways that the problem can be tackled.* |
|  | |  |

* "their" and "there" ("their" indicates possession; "there" indicates place or time)

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | Examples: | *The Royston team has many players who dare to speak their minds. The Royston team has played there many times.* |
|  |  |  |

**Use of Indefinite "it"**

The pronoun "it" has many good uses, but sometimes a reader is not certain to what "it" refers. Consider the following example:

* (Original): *"In the article 'Trouble is a Good Teacher' by Konosuke Matsushita, it tells how failure can lead to wisdom."*
* (Revised): *"The article 'Trouble is a Good Teacher' by Konosuke Matsushita tells how failure can lead to wisdom."*
* (Revised): *"In the article 'Trouble is a Good Teacher,' Konosuke Matsushita tells how failure can lead to wisdom."*

**Contractions and Apostrophes**

An apostrophe ( **'** ) shows ownership or possession.

* Ownership: *"Some people's views…"*
* Ownership: *"In the author's opinion…"*
* Ownership: *"In Hayhurst's book…"*

An apostrophe is also used for contractions. It indicates where letters have been left out of a word.

* Contraction: *"I hadn't thought much about the subject of success."*
* Contraction: *"I've always worked hard and made my own luck."*
* Contraction: *"It's easy to think that failure is final."*

Please note that the contraction *it's* stands for "it is."

The word "its" shows possession, but unlike the possessives above, it does not need an apostrophe. The "its" that shows possession is a pronoun, like "their" and "our." Like those pronouns, no apostrophe is used.

* *It's* [contraction] *about time that everyone learned this rule. English grammar has its* [possessive] *difficulties, but this rule is not hard to learn.*

Contractions contribute to a style that is informal. In forms of writing that are personal or intimate-e.g. letters, diaries, journals-the use of contractions is appropriate. In more formal writing, on the other hand, the full form of the words should be used.

* (Informal): *"I could've committed to a life of seeking money, but I wouldn't be happy with such a life and I won't regret the choice I've made."*
* (Formal): *"I could have committed to a life of seeking money, but I would not be happy with such a life and I will not regret the choice I have made."*

**Underlining and Using Quotation Marks**

In our writing, we frequently refer to the information and ideas from others. Sometimes, the information derives from a book. Other times, it comes from an article or poem.

Depending on the source of the information, we use a different form of punctuation.

If you refer to a work that is an entire book, the title is underlined or italicized.

* "Christine McClymont, in her non-fiction anthology Viewpoints, organizes the articles into ten broad themes."

If you refer to a text that is part of a larger work, the name of the text is placed in quotation marks.

* In "Kelly," by Myrna Kostash, a young volleyball player suggests that girls sometimes afraid of doing too well.

**Wordiness**

The saying that "less is more" is certainly true when applied to writing. Too many words in a sentence can create confusion instead of clarity. When editing your written text, determine if you can be more concise.

Consider the following examples:

* (Wordy): *"I think that the real meaning of success is that you are successful or not if you love what you do."*
* (Edited): *"You are successful if you love what you do."*
* (Wordy): *"The reason that this scares people is because they don't always want to take risks."*
* (Edited): *"This scares people because they don't always want to take risks."*

**Vagueness**

If you write like you speak, your sentences may have a pleasant, conversational quality. They may also have words and phrases that lack precision.

When you edit your text, one expression to watch for is "a lot of." It appears frequently in one form or another and it is best replaced with a more specific word.

* *"I have put up with a lot of pressure from my friends to drink."*
* *"I think a lot about how I might be successful."*
* *"A lot of people dream of success, but aren't willing to work for it."*

Such words as "much," "often," and "many" are better choices.

* (Edited) *"I have put up with much pressure from my friends to drink."*
* (Edited) *"I think often about how I might be successful."*
* (Edited) *"Many people dream of success, but aren't willing to work for it."*